DEPARTMENTAL ASSESSMENT

REPORT

POLITICAL SCIENCE

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Appendix (Syllabi)
Introductory PreScript

This report discusses the standards for assessment specific to the Department of Political Science. For each standard the political science faculty have identified and evaluated the learning outcomes for the department’s curriculum, the methods of assessing our success in achieving those outcomes, and the areas where improvements should be made.

Included, both directly and indirectly, are statements regarding the department’s mission as a component of the larger College community. As a “prescript” to our report we are providing a preliminary mission statement which will be revisited as we continue with the assessment and its implementation. This statement, in various ways, informs the analysis and evaluation of our efforts to achieve the goals of the standards. Accordingly, it pervades our teaching and practice of the discipline as Christian political scientists.

The mission of the department is at least three-fold:

(1) **Disciplinary.** The faculty are trained as political scientists. We have obligations and responsibilities to the “guild” not unlike political scientists elsewhere. Consequently, it is our mission to teach and do scholarship in such a manner that the fundamental themes, concepts, methods, processes, and “nuts and bolts” of the discipline—taken as a whole and within its established subdivisions—are faithfully represented.

(2) **Liberal Arts.** Political science has a long and illustrious history within the western intellectual tradition. In its normative and empirical manifestations, political science is a crucial element of the liberal arts enterprise. Our endeavors as political scientists are directed not only toward education about politics but assisting our students in their development of skills in critical thinking and the expression of ideas in such a manner that the truth shall set them free.

(3) **Christian Higher Education.** We understand that the liberal arts emphases of the College should be addressed within a context of developing, affirming, and strengthening the Christian community. Our goal is to graduate Christian men and women well-versed in the discipline yet committed to putting their knowledge to work in service to Christ and others. We believe this commitment requires consideration of the praxis of Christian belief in a global context where the exercise of political power is examined in accordance with the implications brought to bear by issues such as social, political and economic justice and reconciliation. In doing so, we have adopted the following statement by Reinhold Niebuhr (from *Moral Man and Immoral Society*) as a theme for the mission of the department:

> Politics will to the end of history be an area where conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive factors of human life interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises.

In numerous ways, this orientation toward political life provides the “subtext” for the student learning goals in the standards as presented in this report. And it provides the context for the
manner by which the three of us approach our tasks in addressing and achieving those goals and their objectives. We do not offer our students easy solutions to political problems that, perhaps, result from approaches characterized by doctrinaire or narrow ideological positions. Nor do we believe an understanding of the political world necessarily ends in cynicism, the conclusion that the political enterprise is without hope. Rather, we view our task with an understanding of the realities of politics tempered by ethical demands as informed by Christian faith and practice. This is our understanding and one we wish to instill in our students.
Standard 1: Christian Orientation

Introduction

According to the Christian Orientation Standard, Westmont College wants “students to be informed about the Christian faith” ... and desires that “their lives be characterized by practices, affections, and virtues that grow out of a life of Christian faith.” There is a tendency for many Christians to bifurcate faith and politics (as well as economics, etc.)—in essence, to privatize their faith. We believe that civic engagement, no less than any other endeavor, also should grow out of a “life of Christian faith.” This is very much the goal of the Political Science Department as expressed in the college catalog: “Political science majors are encouraged to perceive their role as Christians in a complex world of domestic and international politics. They learn how to apply Christian values to the study of political science... We encourage our students to develop their Christian faith and to take seriously the responsibility of living that faith in the context of the public square.” We believe that the department implements these goals throughout the curriculum and in who we are as professors of our discipline.

Student Learning Outcomes

Knowledge:

The Political Science faculty emphasizes Christian and faith–based perspectives in a wide range of lower and upper division courses. Various traditions of and attitudes toward Christian involvement in public life are discussed in American Government, Principles of Political Science, political theory courses, and the Christianity and Politics course. In–depth study of Christian political thinkers (i.e. Augustine [and Niebuhr] and Aquinas [and Fletcher]) characterizes the Political Theory course—a significant departure from similar offerings on secular campuses. Courses in constitutional law, international politics, developing nations, ideologies, and women and politics emphasize Christian perspectives on civil rights, poverty, feminism, war, and environmental stewardship. In these efforts, the faculty uses Biblical and other religious texts on obedience, power, justice, leadership, and governance, as well as notable Christian thinkers (e.g. Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, Niebuhr, Children of Light and Children of Darkness, Skillen, Scattered Voices: Christians at Odds in the Public Square, Noll, Hatch, and Marsden, The Search for Christian America, Sider, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger, Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail, Mary Steward Van Leeuwen, Gender and Grace). Courses in international relations, political theory, and Christianity and politics explore the role of the church in colonial politics and the emerging American political culture.

Practice:

Learning about the relationship between faith and politics is insufficient. The department also seeks to provide opportunities for students to model their personal lives and their knowledge of the relationship between faith and politics. In classroom courses, the entire faculty uses group projects to help students work corporately and develop the Christian virtues of “honesty, courage, self-control, prudence, faith, hope, and love.” We emphasize the complexity and
diversity of various political cultures, including our own, in order to increase our students’ “sensitivity to...God and other people.” In domestic and international relations courses, we encourage students to think and act as global Christians, not merely as ethnocentric American Christians. This includes the analysis of alternative and/or minority Christian perspectives such as liberation theology. In the Governing course, students become aware of domestic policy and administrative careers and opportunities for Christian service in the public sector as well as the nonprofit and private sectors.

For political science majors, practice extends beyond the classroom. In the required internship course and in off-campus programs featuring internships, students apply and reflect on their political science knowledge and personal faith in a wide variety of work-based settings. Journaling and other written assignments across a number of courses encourage students to reflect on their own faith as it relates to politics and to develop their own political philosophies, ideologies, and policy positions accordingly.

The faculty model the relationship between faith and politics, not just by our chosen vocation but in how we relate to students in and out of the classroom. We attempt to express our own views without being overly doctrinaire. We readily participate in campus wide events (Phi Kappa Phi and Faculty Exchange panels, film series discussions, and lecture programs) and model Christian civility in the process. Through various off-campus opportunities (notably the Sacramento field trip and the Model United Nations program), students are able to see us live out our faith as we carry out teaching duties, handle logistical details, and face the myriad challenges of such endeavors.

Assessment

How do we know these efforts are effective? Because many of the activities described above are course-based, we assess student outcomes in many of the usual ways—exams, papers, journals, and student presentations. Admittedly, as the standard indicates, we cannot “guarantee specific outcomes” in this area, let alone assess with certainty attitudinal change. Anecdotal evidence and faculty discussions suggest that many of our majors experience palpable change in their ability to express and apply a progressively sophisticated understanding of faith and politics during the span of their Westmont career. To be sure, many of these changes continue well after they graduate. Formal alumni surveys, inquiries from graduates, and feedback at homecoming events all suggest that we have made a significant impact in this area of our mission.

Making Improvements

Although we believe we are performing admirably, improvements can be made.

(a) We could be more deliberate and methodical in our coverage of faith-based issues and our methods of assessment of student activities and assignments. For instance, we need to continually ask ourselves, “If this is as important a component of a particular course as I say it is, am I devising specific assignments, readings, and exam materials accordingly?”
(b) This current assessment process suggests that each of us could better cross-reference what the others are doing. In other words, with better knowledge of each other’s curricula and approaches, we could reinforce the subjects, perspectives, and approaches taken by colleagues in our own courses.
Standard 2: Critical–Interdisciplinary Thinking

Introduction

The history of (western) political science demonstrates that from its origins (viz. classical Greek political theory and analysis) to the present, the goals of this standard historically have been the foundations of the discipline. Long before the modern schisms in intellectual thought and practice, the study of politics was considered the “master” or “queen” science. It was taken for granted that to understand the community (polis) it was incumbent to study: human nature (anthropology, psychology), social relationships (sociology, social–psychology), distribution of resources (economics), the context of human communities (geography), distribution and exercise of power and authority (local and comparative politics), among others. And these understandings were dependent upon sound philosophical moorings: the epistemological, ontological, ethical, aesthetical and other concerns necessary to answering the question (based on critical examination of one’s own assumptions), What is and how do we achieve the good life? We may not agree with their conclusions, or how they arrived at them, but modern political science reflects the comprehensiveness found in its ancient roots. Political science by its very nature is critical and interdisciplinary. We believe that when the department’s curriculum is approached as a whole, it is doing well by this standard.

Student Learning Outcomes

The standard will be parsed by separating the two components (“Critical Thinking” and “Interdisciplinary Thinking”).

(A) Critical (and Intra–disciplinary) Thinking

It is common place to say there are two areas in which everyone is expert: religion and politics. In our experience there is some truth to the statement (although, admittedly, we encounter students with nearly no knowledge or understanding of politics). A consequence is that students come to political science typically with little critical self–examination of their ideological assumptions, beliefs, and policy preferences. Our task is to facilitate that examination. We understand much of this is developmental; first year students are different than seniors. Nevertheless, our efforts in assisting their critical thinking commences with the introductory survey courses. Fact–gathering and description are necessary but insufficient; thus, early–on, higher cognitive skills are stressed as well: moving students to synthesis, analysis, evaluation and interpretation, and prescription.

Accordingly, prominent in nearly all of the syllabi (explicitly and implicitly) is the goal and the objective of critical thinking (for example):

- critical analysis of the manner by which historical, geographical, social, economic traditions and situations produce different policies among nations
- analyses and evaluations of the origins and the evolutions of competing political
theories and ideologies

• evaluation of the impact of governmental policies internally and externally; unintended consequences of policy decisions

• discerning the relevance and truth of one’s class learning as reflected through experiences at an internship site or participation in the National Model United Nations program

• critical assessment of empirical methodologies and techniques; philosophy of (social/behavioral) science; educated consumption of empirical findings (poll data, e.g.)

• evaluation of course content in terms of Christian belief and practice and vice versa

(B) Interdisciplinary Thinking

Indicated in the introduction, political science inherently is inter-disciplinary. No course in the curriculum fails to draw from one or more other disciplines. Consequently, students learn how the other social, behavioral and natural sciences and the humanities inform the study of politics; how alternative epistemologies, methodologies and techniques can be used, and so forth. These interdisciplinary efforts provide content and method and point to the gaps or inadequacies within our discipline. In other words, consideration of the natural sciences and the humanities provide a critique of the political science students’ chosen discipline. In that regard, we would agree with those who say that interdisciplinary studies naturally produce critical thinking.

Evidence of these outcomes is seen in the following:

• PO 4 Introduction to International Politics: the impact of history, geography, social, economic and cultural traditions; consideration of social (poverty) and environmental issues

• PO 126 Women and Politics: examining linkages between women’s political behavior and the resources available in psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics and religion

• PO 001 Principles of Political Science: consideration of “first principles” before the study of specific ideologies (based on Tinder’s Political Thinking): e.g., are human beings estranged in essence? (sociology, psychology, biblical theology)?

• PO 132 American Political Experience: A study drawing from political theory (liberalism, Madisionian republicanism...), sociological theory (social construction of reality, organizational structures...), natural sciences (what do the findings of modern science, particularly the implications of quantum mechanics, have for the practice of political science behavioral research?), psychology (obedience to authority, nature of experimental social psychological research...), etc.
• **PO 103 Governing: Doing Public Policy:** incorporating the findings from studies in organizational behavior (historical, sociological and psychological); case study research in substantive issues (education, welfare, transportation, health care...)

• **PO/HIS 178 California Experience:** team-taught with a historian; examining the Californian “experience” from the perspectives of political science, history, geography, geology, sociology, literature, popular culture...

**Assessment**

The department uses a multi-method approach to promote and assess critical thinking. Most courses incorporate a variety of “testing” mechanisms and other assignments that move students beyond information processing (factual description) to synthesis, analysis, evaluation and interpretation.

• **testing:** So-called “objective tests” (multiple-choice questions, etc.) include essay questions requiring students to critique the material covered in that exam

• **alternative testing:** Some courses substitute essay assignments and mini-research projects for the traditional exam. Typically, upper-division courses have only essay exams where students can demonstrate their skills in critical and independent thinking, or “take-home” essay assignments in which the material for a given course segment must be synthesized, evaluated and critiqued

• **journals:** The department makes frequent use journals in which students critically reflect on their readings and experiences in an on-going fashion

• **dialectics:** One professor makes extensive use of a form of study guide he calls “conversations with the text.” Part study-guide for reading assignments and part reflections on the readings, answering questions that encourage the student to think beyond the immediate text and struggle with implications of what the text is reporting

• **research papers:** Discernment of sources, the analysis of work independent of personal opinion...

• **rough drafts and rewrites:** In some classes students are encouraged to submit rough drafts of written work; these provide interactions with the professor early on and thus afford an opportunity to address weaknesses or inadequacies that can be corrected

• **interviews:** Students interview people outside of the college in preparation for writing reports and research papers. Interviews, therefore, necessitate student understandings of the issues so that thoughtful and critical questions can be asked, as well as correlating those findings from that “other world” to the world of the classroom

• **honors theses:** Departmental majors have a strong history in writing major honors
theses. These projects, across the campus, mandate the highest level of student scholarship, critical thinking, and oftentimes interdisciplinary concerns. Those written in political science are guided to ensure that both components are of the highest order.

The department is generally satisfied with its efforts under the Critical–Interdisciplinary Thinking standard. Assessment methods (noted above) suggest this is the case. Of course, there is diversity among the students; some do better than others but that is true for all disciplines. We also recognize student success in critical/interdisciplinary thinking when they demonstrate that their political science education is becoming cumulative: bringing into a course’s discussion their understandings and interpretations developed in other political science classes, as well as drawing upon their studies outside the political science curriculum: connections between Constitutional Law and Political Theory, domestic law in international law, the role (or lack thereof) of women in political life, etc. We have recognized development in their collaborative efforts. It is not uncommon to assign collaborative research projects, or permit collaborative quiz taking. What these exercises demonstrate is that the students recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their individual understandings of course materials; we hear (and hear about) their calling each other to task, to articulate and defend their positions in light of their peers’ challenges. And we take satisfaction in the outcome whereby we observe a student who comes to college with a simplistic, dichotomous, ideologically-driven political world-view critically address his or her assumptions over time, coming to the realization that problems can be complex, that truth is both discovered and created, that good people and good Christians can disagree, and that humility toward one’s own positions and charity for others’ is a virtue and not a vice.

Making Improvements

The primary area for development is greater interaction with our colleagues in team–teaching (within the department and working with other departments) and guest lecturing. Although we have done this to some extent, we should be more intentional in doing so. The value of participating with other colleagues can be a great benefit to the students. They observe the manner in which the disciplines (and professors) agree and disagree, how they borrow from and critically examine one another; students develop greater insight into their majors as well as the others.
Standard 3: Diversity

Introduction

The Political Science Department is in agreement that issues of diversity (such as social class, gender, ethnicity, political ideology, culture, sexual orientation, and religion) must be included as part of a liberal arts education, but also as an integral component of our political science courses. Indeed, to understand creation and the Christian call to “love our neighbors as ourselves” requires self-reflection and knowledge about the multiple differences existing among people.

As political scientists, we recognize that the political process intrinsically concerns conflict and cooperation among individuals and groups with divergent perspectives, ideologies and backgrounds as well as inequalities of wealth, resources and power. However, given the description of the specific student learning outcomes associated with the diversity standard, we are struck by the lack of attention to political concerns. This is the case in the college catalog text and the general education requirements. To educate students about diversity requires not only attention to the differences that exist among people, but how those differences are expressed in social, economic and political terms. Social movements often become political movements which call for political change. We must educate students about participation in a diverse and pluralistic “public square” if they truly to become global Christians (as called for as part of Westmont’s mission). In sum, the department strongly encourages that the political aspects of diversity be more fully addressed in faculty discussions of the diversity standard.

Student Learning Outcomes

We concur that our students cannot avoid learning about diversity issues because these concerns are important subjects for our discipline. Diversity issues are addressed in virtually every political science course. While some courses, more than others, address diversity topics as a central part of the class material, each course raises important questions related to gender, class, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, and/or culture. More specifically, we analyze topics including:

- the role of women in the church, society and political leadership
- religious differences and political violence
- the challenge of governance in a hyperpluralistic American culture
- civil and political rights
- Marxism, class analysis, and feminism (and other hermeneutics that challenge western orthodoxies)
- the nature of understanding and truth in a multi-cultural and post-modern world
- the different types of Christianity in American and global society
- problems of ethnocentrism
- the politics of race, national and state identity
- demographic change in the United States and elsewhere
While not all of these issues are systematically addressed in every course and in every class, we believe that students are challenged to think about a range of historical and contemporary issues that necessarily involve issues of social, economic and political diversity.

Furthermore, the department believes it is important for students to understand the diversity within the discipline of political science by observing women, people of color, and non-Western scholars doing political science. For example, in PO 112 (International Law) students read cases written by non-Western legal scholars while in PO 1 (Principles of Political Science) students read texts by such diverse political theorists as Stalin, Castro, Mao Tse-Tung and Friedan. In PO 126 (Women and Politics) readings include selections by bell hooks, Amrita Basu, Alice Walker, and Haleh Afshar. In PO 10 (AmericanGovernment) the course is centered around the theme of *America: The Politics of Diversity*, the textbook written by Lawrence.

We also agree that by discussing issues of diversity, we are fulfilling some of the expectations of the other standards. For example, departmental members frequently make connections between diversity issues and the imperatives of Christian ethics, reconciliation and justice. And, to help cultivate students who are tolerant and loving towards people unlike themselves requires both critical and interdisciplinary thinking and social/intellectual engagement.

Assessment

How do we assess student understanding of diversity issues? We use a range of pedagogical methods:

- **traditional lecture and testing:** students are presented with description and analysis on topics of diversity and then are tested on their ability to describe, synthesize and analyze course material

- **the Socratic method:** students are engaged in analytical dialogue about substantive course material

- **class discussion:** led by either the professor or student related to matters of diversity

- **reflective journals:** students are expected to critically reflect on the course material

- **essay assignments:** students conduct research and write on topics related to diversity

- **e-mail conversations:** students are encouraged to contact the professor or other students about course related material to continue dialogue on important issues

- **off-campus program participation**

- **internship experiences**
Given that diversity issues often comprise substantive portions of course material, students are required to demonstrate skills of comprehension and critical analysis through many written and oral assignments. In PO 126 (Women and Politics), for example, students write an essay analyzing how a female political leader is portrayed by the media through conducting a content analysis of news articles. Class lectures and discussions provide one of the most important vehicles for on-going analysis and reflection about matters of diversity. When students engage in political dialogue with the professor or other students, we have the opportunity to help shape their responses to others who may be different from themselves. A less tangible method of assessment is when we witness greater student sensitivity, humility, and sophistication over four years of participation in our department.

Making Improvements

Each departmental member addresses diversity issues; indeed, as we stated earlier, the very essence of our discipline compels us to do so.

(a) While all departmental members address and critique issues related to diversity, some of our courses do not readily encompass issues related to cross-cultural understanding (such as those with a more narrow focus on American political processes such as Congress or the Presidency). Yet, even these courses address diversity issues: the role of women in governance, the absence of minority office–holders of the Presidency, and the impact and implications of American cultural diversity on public policy formation.

(b) We are committed to evaluating our courses to see where we can be more intentional about addressing diversity topics. At a minimum, explicit attention needs to be given to diversity issues as part of course objectives and as represented by the specific assignments and readings that are selected. For example, although we address the role of the Christian church both nationally and internationally, we recognize that we can do a more thorough job in discussing how the Church differs from region to region and nation to nation as part of our study of the Church and political life and action.

(c) With regard to student foreign language competency, we encourage our students to take foreign languages. Perhaps more discussion could take place among our department members and the college as a whole about college–wide requirements for language competency.

More specifically:

(1) Include more readings by non–Western authors, women and people of color to allow students greater understanding about the contribution provided by peoples of diverse backgrounds

(2) Be more explicit in course syllabi about objectives related to diversity. For those courses which do not address as many diversity issues, consider how diversity topics could be incorporated into the class.
(3) Bring more speakers to campus and to our classrooms who can speak related to issues of diversity.

(4) Develop the political theory courses to be more inclusive of diversity.

(5) Make connections to other colleagues' courses in relationship to diversity topics.

(6) Guest lecture in each other's classes on topics of diversity.

(7) Develop links on our departmental website that address issues of diversity.

(8) Greater encouragement of off-campus program participation.
Standard 4: Active Social and Intellectual Engagement (Life–Long Learning)

Introduction

The Political Science Department at Westmont College plays and ought to play an important role in helping students “engage” with the larger world around them. We have always considered as important what higher education leaders increasingly regard as an essential mission of today’s colleges and universities. “This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit society or how to influence democratic decision making. We must teach the skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship” (Presidents’ Fourth of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, 1999).

This is what we try to accomplish with our majors. We begin with basic knowledge of politics and the role of power in society. As the college catalogue indicates, the “political science major helps students understand the organization and functions of political systems, institutions, and processes in the United States and the global community.” The department’s mission in this area extends to all Westmont students. “The department is committed to helping non–majors become politically competent citizens in a world increasingly characterized by political, social, and economic diversity.”

Student Learning Outcomes

As we review the work of the department relative to this standard, we consider four sets of learning outcomes: interpersonal competence, personal competence, tools for continued learning, and a sense of Christian vocation.

(a) Interpersonal Competence: Standard 4 calls for interpersonal competence “needed to navigate a quickly changing and demanding workplace including effective communication and group cooperation.” The department employs a number of pedagogies to increase student competence along these lines. In terms of oral communication, many courses feature oral presentations, classroom discussion, and simulations requiring speaking skill. In terms of written communication, we emphasize numerous and varied written assignments from journals, to personal political positions, to structured responses, to formal research papers. Many courses also emphasize group cooperation in the form of group–oriented research, paired research assignments, and simulations.

(b) Personal Competence: Standard 4 calls for students to develop “broad and expansive sympathies” for the downtrodden of the world, to demonstrate “responsibility for their own learning,” and to have the “skills, knowledge, and motivation to be effective participants in the civic, charitable, and cultural lives of their communities.” The faculty implement this standard in numerous ways. Negotiation skills are developed in an American Government simulation, a Constitutional law opinion writing assignment, and in the United Nations and International Law course. We require that students take responsibility for their own learning through student–led
class discussions, journaling, Q-sort and other empirical research exercises, and the assignment of personal statements on politics that require the development and expression of personal political views and values.

(c) Tools for Continued Learning: A college degree may be a long-sought goal of our students but it is just the beginning of a process of life-long learning. Political science students acquire and hone a number of analytical skills that they take with them as political science and Westmont alumni.

- They develop the ability to critically read and evaluate textual material. This applies to textbook material, but also to careful attention to and close reading of primary texts in political theory and court cases in constitutional law.

- We teach students to critically evaluate various media including television news and documentaries, international news (e.g. the Financial Times) and national news (e.g. the Washington Post).

- Given the importance of public opinion and its assessment in American politics, we help students analyze opinion polls and their statistical and interpretative significance.

- The analysis of public policy in various courses gives students the political foundations for monitoring the policy process throughout their lives.

(d) Sense of Christian Vocation: The Political Science Department is committed to helping Westmont students see the value of public and civic life as a legitimate Christian calling, as legitimate as any other endeavor represented on this campus. To this end, the department employs a number of strategies. First, in various courses we place an emphasis on Biblical justice, caring for the “least of these,” challenging political and economic elites (“speaking truth to power”), encouraging a globally-minded faith, and teaching various Christian perspectives on leadership. Second, we encourage students to critique organizational life in America (PO 103 and 132) and consider through direct and participant observation potential career options (PO 190). Examples include various public and private sector positions in Santa Barbara, San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and even abroad.

Assessment

For this standard, we have included various assessment mechanisms within the outcomes themselves (papers, oral presentations, journals, etc.). As with other standards, these methods of assessment are course-based and relatively easy to identify. Perhaps a less objective measure of success in developing civic engagement is our record of attracting political science majors once students come to campus. That is, many of our majors develop a sense of civic engagement while here that they did not bring with them to campus as new students. Even given the apolitical and antipolitical attitudes prevalent on campus, numerous students find the department’s mission as expressed in our courses compelling and attractive. Another measure is
the number of our graduates who spend some or all of their careers in the public square (working in government at all levels, the law, nonprofit organizations, diplomacy, etc.).

Making Improvements

Even with our relative success at meeting this standard, we believe that the department could be more effective. In particular, we should encourage student engagement outside the classroom. This was done to some extent with the Political Science/Westmont Foundation Lecture Series. In partnership with our majors, we could do more to establish local chapters of, for example, the Center For Public Justice, Evangelicals for Social Action, or the International Justice Mission.

One caveat is appropriate. Although we do a credible job with our own majors relative to this standard, we are limited in our ability to touch more student lives on this campus, at least at this time. For decades, the value of civic competence and public engagement has been decidedly undervalued in the College Mission Statement, various mission statement updates/drafts, and in the General Education requirements. Standard 4 itself could be much more explicit in terms of the importance of political and civic, as well as societal, competence.
Standard 5: Written and Oral Communication

Introduction

A number of the outcomes already discussed are assessed primarily through written and oral communication assignments. Although these assignments follow from the expectations and objectives for specific courses, writing and speaking assignments require students to "demonstrate a full range of abilities from lower to higher order thinking skills," "speak and write with rhetorical effectiveness," among other specific outcomes. Taken in toto we believe the differing types of communication exercises address the purposes of this standard. Referring again to other portions of this report which document the content of the political science curriculum, in our estimation the specific outcomes for this standard having to do with displaying historical, cultural and other-disciplinary awareness (no. 4), Christian faith and practice without reliance on popular clichés (no. 5), and mature, critically insightful self-assessment (first part no. 6) are met satisfactorily. We also believe the communication standard is enacted by their reading and listening to other “texts.” There is utility in exposing students to a range of texts written by others that serve as models for their own writing, based on the assumption that one also learns to write well by reading what is well-written. This would hold true in oral communication; in that respect, students need to be sensitive to the speech patterns of their peer group and we, as professors, are admonished to take care in our public presentations (lectures, discussion leadership, etc.).

Student Learning Outcomes

(A) Written Communication,

Curricular efforts to meet the standard for written communication include:

- examination essay questions (from brief responses to complex, multi-part essay questions)
- journals
- "free writes" (such as in-class writing in preparation for a day’s topic or review of that class period’s topic)
- "dialectics" and other study guide write-outs
- annotated bibliographies
- research papers and honors theses

Our expectations for written communication derive from the conviction that the more students write, the more effective they will be as writers.
(B) Oral Communication

Curricular efforts to meet the standard for oral communication include:

- class discussion
- class presentations:
  (a) e.g., oral presentation of case studies and similar assignments related to a specific course component
  (b) e.g., presentation of a semester’s research project
  (c) e.g., responsibility for reviewing and leading class discussion (“lecturing”) for significant topic in a class period
  (d) e.g., negotiations in simulations
- honors thesis defense

In some courses class oral participation on a regular basis is assumed (not included as a grading component) whereas in others the expectation is built into the grading system. Given the findings of research in classroom behavior, especially with regard to socialization to gender differences, special effort is made to “democratize” participation by ensuring that women students, in particular, are encouraged to participate (reinforced in “break-out” sessions used in several classes whereby the class divides into smaller discussion groups—typically, female students participate to a greater extent in the smaller contexts). In many cases, students are required to provide outlines of their presentation in written form, thereby furthering the linkage between oral and written communication.

Assessment Methods

(a) Written Communication

Evaluation of these assignments (as appropriate in each case) takes into account vocabulary, grammar, spelling, organization, expression. Guidelines are provided (either in syllabi or in additional documentation) for the organization and style of the manuscripts based on the standards of the political science profession (font, point size, presentation of graphics and other tabular results, bibliographic resources and notation, ...). Mentioned earlier, in some instances students are encouraged to review rough drafts with their professors and/or are allowed to rewrite a paper following the first evaluation by the professor. In other instances, students are encouraged to collaborate in their preparation for out-of-class essays with the understanding that the final document is their own production. And in other instances, research projects are structured to be entirely collaborative, requiring students within their groups to make decisions as to who will write what, to be accountable to their group for what they write, and to struggle with the logistics of making a “committee document” read as whole. In these cases, in varying ways, students are expected to assess their peers’ participation and contribution to the project as a part of the professor’s determination of grades for the project (however, we still find students
are too “generous” toward one another, which holds true for peer assessment of oral communication).

(B) Oral Communication

Students are given specific guidelines when they prepare their formal class presentations (of research, the lecture...), e.g., time limits (requiring editing), content expectations, preparing questions to ask of the class, as well as expectations for rhetorical style (avoiding the negative aspects of the speech patterns of their peer group [not using alota “likes” and “you knows” and ending declarative sentences with the inflection of a question?]). It is a matter of course that students provide assessments of their peers’ class presentations (e.g., working with a “check-list” stipulating evaluation of how well the presentation was organized, the sources for the presentation [relevant or not to the content...], style, ability to be heard, and so on. In some classes where on-going class participation is a specific requirement, at the end of the semester students provide a self-assessment of the quantity and quality of their participation which is considered in the grade for that component.

Assessment

The department is very satisfied with its efforts to meet the written communication standard. It is simply the case that all students in every political science course will engage in more than one form of written communication. Our majors demonstrate progress from their beginning classes to their upper division ones; we comment among ourselves how written work in the later courses have fewer “technical” errors and how our marginal comments become more substantive. And we take great delight when alumni report how thankful they are that we “forced” them to do all of that writing.

Our efforts in oral communication are probably “average” and on par with efforts elsewhere in the college curricula. What we expect and the assignments given to operationalize those expectations are helpful to developing student success in oral communication.

Making Improvements

(1) There is very little student peer assessment of written work. Inasmuch as there can be great utility in having students read what other students write, we should consider ways and means for facilitating this.

(2) As Sociology/Anthropology has done, political science students would benefit from having a standardized style manual for written work. (Perhaps this is an issue that could be addressed college wide. There is no reason for each department to reinvent the wheel. One possibility is to develop a standard style manual for, say, the social and behavioral sciences and then have each department create an addendum for peculiarities specific to its discipline.) Another possibility is to create a comprehensive style manual that includes both written and oral communication guidelines.
(3) We need to consider how we can make oral communication a central component in more of our courses and develop methods of assessment as comprehensive as those already in place for written work.
Standard Six: Technology

Introduction

Many outcomes already discussed rely upon the ability of students to master an increasingly complex world in which technology rapidly changes and develops. Students will enter a professional world requiring them to be technologically adept. Beyond providing training in the realm of technological proficiency, an education at Westmont College should equip students with the ability to critically evaluate ethical approaches regarding the development and distribution of information technologies. To participate as global Christians and to effectively communicate with others requires the ability to demonstrate computer literacy and a sophisticated understanding of the diverse and complex issues intrinsic to any pursuit of knowledge. In sum, we affirm that learning about technology goes beyond mere facility with software; it should move students to think critically about the world in which they live and work including the critical evaluation of the role of technology in a modern and post-modern world.

Student Learning Outcomes

(1) Familiarity with technologies and software: The department actively encourages and requires student familiarity with a variety of software programs. In addition to student use of general and discipline-specific software, students hand in many of their assignments via e-mail. Students and professors maintain contact with each other through frequent use of e-mail.

General Software: The department expects its students to be facile in the use of text-writing programs such as WordPerfect and Word. Students are given assignments that require demonstration of word processing skills.

Discipline-related Software: Students currently are (or will be) instructed in the use of statistical analysis program software such as MicroCase, SPSS, PQMethod, etc., primarily for data analysis in political science courses. Students are required to conduct primary research to develop and analyze new data sets as well as secondary analysis of existing ones.

Hardware: Students use personal computers and networked computers and hand calculators as appropriate.

(2) Electronic Resources in Research and Critical Evaluation of Data: Students are expected to master use of Internet resources as part of learning how to conduct political research. Many political science courses require Internet research as a primary method for conducting both primary and secondary research in the discipline. Specific writing and research assignments address detailed requirements of conducting political research using the Internet. As part of becoming wise consumers of technological resources, students are instructed to critically evaluate web-derived information. For example, students are taught to recognize differences between Internet sources representing official organizations and professional databases versus personal and other sources of questionable validity. Additionally, the expectations for the proper
citation of electronic sources are also discussed. In this area, many of our courses use the training sessions provided by the Library to supplement class teaching in the area of electronic research.

On-line search engines: Students are required to use resources such as First Search, Ebscohost, and Lexis-Nexis.

Course-specific electronic resources: For every course offered by the department, there are an abundance of specific Internet sites which provide valuable course material for students. Comparative and International Politics: Sites of foreign governments, such as the House of Commons web site; NATO; the United Nations, the European Union and its databases; political parties, etc. American Politics: Political parties; interest groups; the House and Senate; the Presidency; LAWlink; Federal Court Locator, etc.

(3) Ethical Approaches and Perspectives on Technology: Through discussion and lecture, students are introduced to many important topics in the area of information technology. The department acknowledges that the information revolution has produced profound political, economic and social change. However, technological change has been unequal and uneven throughout much of the world; as such, students in the political science department are taught about the implications of technological change on national and international development (as well as about many other salient issues involving information technologies). These national and global trends are analyzed as part of many of our courses. Some of our class discussions include the following topics:

- maldistribution of worldwide technological access
- technological impact on political and economic change
- the ethics of a "global consumer culture" and "cultural homogenization"
- media technology and democracy
- Internet (virtual) communities
- ethics of data acquisition
- ethical use of data (honesty in reporting data, privacy, ethical treatment of human subjects)
- impact of costs of use of technology (e.g., for clients in legal research)

The department relies upon a wide range of assessment methods. Assessment for the technology standard has included evaluation of various forms of written work, including exams, papers, Internet assignments and statistical homework assignments, as well as class discussion.

Assessment and Making Improvements

The department believes that is performing reasonably well in this area. We are in the process of constructing a departmental web site which will contain links to other political sites. In the future, we would like to develop further the technological competency of our students by requiring them to do more class presentations and research using spreadsheets, graphs, charts as well as statistical analysis program software, and in becoming partners in updating the
departmental web site. This will, in part, require continuing faculty education so that we might be able to improve our technological proficiencies. Lastly, our syllabi could call attention to this area of learning more systematically.
Concluding PostScript

In our assessment project we identified several issues deserving attention in future deliberations. Some of these were noted in the discussion of the standards; some were implicit; and others "transcend" the specific criteria and goals of the standards yet are important to the improvement of the department. These, we believe, are candidates for exploration as we move into the implementation stage (presented in no particular order).

(1) We believe we need to develop greater clarity and specificity in the statement of course objectives in our syllabi.

(2) We believe the curriculum should be more explicit in its treatment of the interaction between politics and media. Although this topic is addressed currently in various courses and in various ways, given the central role of mass media in our lives, the issues involved deserve concerted attention. In this manner, the "politics and media" analyses also correlate with the goals of "critical thinking" and "life-long learning."

(3) We believe the department should make greater use of inter- and intra-disciplinary team teaching and guest lecturing. Thus far, a few political science courses have been team-taught (Christianity and Politics [Lawrence and McKeown], American Foreign Policy [Bhatti and McKeown]) in addition to an interdisciplinary course (The California Experience [Lawrence and Pointer]), and we have guest lectured in each others' classes. We are convinced of the utility of these and wish to make greater use of them in the future.

(4) We believe we need an additional full-time faculty member with expertise in non-American, non-western regional politics (e.g., Asian, African, Latin and South American....).

(5) We believe we should institute assessment methods that deal with students’ experiences in political science taken as a whole, i.e., in addition to but more comprehensive than assessing student learning in specific courses. For example: exit interviews with graduating seniors, senior exams (perhaps the GRE subject area examination), a senior level “capstone” course, the development of political science “concepts and principles master list.” At the beginning of Fall semester 2000 we administered a survey to our introductory courses (voting preference, party identification, political attitudes...); through time these will give us comparative data about the students we teach.

(6) We believe we (finally) are in position to engage in a comprehensive curricular review. In large part due to the revolving door in the comparative and international politics position (four different persons over 12 years), we have not been able to achieve this. Changes have been incremental. Now, however, we are able evaluate the entire curriculum (courses to be modified, deleted, added; reevaluation of major and minor requirements; core courses and electives requirements, etc). Although this task extends beyond the present assessment objectives, many of those objectives may be achieved by the curricular review and its implementation.